

PLATYPALPUS ARTICULATOIDES (FREY)
(DIPT., EMPIDIDAE) NEW TO BRITAIN

By A. A. ALLEN, B.Sc.*

While staying for a few days with friends at Foul登, near Swaffham in West Norfolk (TL 769 900), in late June, 1979, I met with a tiny yellow-legged *Platypalpus* in some numbers at two spots about a mile apart, in the course of sweeping long grass and other roadside herbage. Both sites were more or less overhung by or at least adjacent to trees or shrubs, otherwise they appeared to have no special character in common. Of the sample I succeeded in collecting, only one fly, a female, chanced to survive the hazards of storage and eventual pinning in reasonable condition, and this, whilst keying out to *P. articulatus* Macq. in Collin (1961: 191-2), seemed not to agree fully with his description of that species. With the co-operation of Mr. K. G. V. Smith at the British Museum (Nat. Hist.) it was submitted to Dr. P. Grootaert in Brussels, who duly returned it as *P. articulatoides* (Frey, 1918), a species new to the British list. In a highly informative letter, complete with drawings, he points out that this species, *articulatus* Macq., and *maculimanus* (Zett.) form a group of closely similar species, the latter not being a synonym of *articulatus* as hitherto supposed. The following is an adaptation of the key kindly furnished by Dr. Grootaert; *P. maculimanus* is included, since it will most likely prove to be British.

Very small grey-dusted species with legs largely yellow; one pair of vertical bristles; antennae short, yellow with segment 3 black; mid-tibial spurs very short, blunt, shovel-shaped — this feature requires to be viewed sideways, as, seen from above, the spur can appear to taper to a point.

1/2 Palpi and coxae yellow; front tarsi with all segments sharply and deeply black-annulated; other tarsi not annulated but apical half or more of terminal segment brown to black. *Male*: left periandrial lamella with very long, stiff, yellow to whitish bristles on its outer margin *articulatoides*.

2/1 Palpi and the four hinder coxae brown to black; front tarsi with segments 1, 2, and 5 black-annulated, but 3 and 4 almost yellow; other tarsi either brown-annulated or largely dark. *Male*: left periandrial lamella with only very short bristles *on its outer margin*.

3/4 Spur all yellow; ♂ left periandrial lamella with about six long *black* bristles *near tip* *articulatus*.

4/3 Spur with black tip; ♂ left periandrial lamella with only very short bristles *maculimanus*.

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Dr. Grootaert further points out that *P. articulatus* in Chvála (1975: 181-3) is in fact *P. maculimanus*, as proved by his figures of the male genitalia (fig. 452) and of the middle leg which shows a dark-tipped spur (fig. 225). A description and figures of *P. articulatooides* are given by Chvála (pp.183-4); he records it as rare in Denmark and Fennoscandia, North Russia and Latvia, Czechoslovakia and Austria, and as found on ground-vegetation and bushes from the end of May to July.

Last year I was able to revisit the Norfolk locality and was at length successful in locating the colony in Foulden village. The fly's headquarters here proved to be a piece of rough, overgrown open ground partly enclosed by hedges on two sides and row of willows on a third; it was, however, not to be found at all on these, but only by sweeping the ground-vegetation. The sexes were in about equal numbers. The nearby roadside verges and hedgebanks also were well swept, but yielded none. I searched, too, for the other colony without success, doubtless on account of recent local changes.

It is difficult to be sure that *P. articulatooides* has not previously been taken in this country and confused with *P. articulatus*. Probably this has not occurred, to judge from Collin's account of the latter species (*l.c. supra*) — even though his description of the front tarsal annulation scarcely agrees with the above diagnosis. In discussing its synonymy he mentions and briefly characterizes '*articuloides* Frey' (*sic*), as a closely allied species described from North Russia. A further significant point is that, as Collin notes (and in strong contrast to British experience of *articulatooides*), only females of *articulatus* appear so far to be known here.

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to Dr. P. Gootaert for identifying the specimen sent and for providing valuable information not then published; to Mr. K. G. V. Smith for his good offices in the matter; and to my friends Mr. and Mrs. A. W. Gould, without whose kind hospitality the above record would not have been made.

References

- Chvála, M., 1975, The Tachydromiinae (Dipt. Empididae) of Fennoscandia and Denmark, *Faun. ent. Scand.*, 3. Klampenborg.
Collin, J. E., 1961, *British Flies*, 6 (Empididae), Cambridge.

[Since writing the above I have heard from Mr. Ivan Perry, of Cambridge, that he took *P. articulatooides* last summer in that

county. At his request, I gladly seize the opportunity to append his records here:—

2♂♂, 1 ♀, 1.viii.85, and 3♂♂, 6 ♀♀, 3.viii.85, all by sweeping *Sparganium erectum* at the edges of two ponds at Quy Fen, Cambs. (TL 513 628).

The flies were identified by Dr. Ian McLean. It will be noticed that the site of Mr. Perry's captures — close to water — differs considerably in character from that of the Norfolk occurrences. — A. A. A.]

“IT IS FOUND . . . ON ALL SORTS OF LOW PLANTS”

By DENIS F. OWEN*

The above title could have been taken from almost anywhere in Richard South's *Moths of the British Isles* (Warne, London), first published nearly eighty years ago, and still the standard source of information on larval food-plants. In fact it comes from South's account of the food-plants of *Melanchra persicariae* (dot moth), one of the many species described as feeding on “low plants.”

Table 1 summarises the families and species of plants utilised by the larvae of four species of Noctuidae in a garden** at Leicester in 1972-84. The four species, *Lacanobia oleracea* (bright-line brown-eye), *Mamestra brassicae* (cabbage moth), *Melanchra persicariae* (dot moth) and *Phlogophora meticulosa* (angle shades) are abundant in the garden and larvae are easily found by searching or beating the foliage of plants. The sample is not exactly random — some plants are easier to search than others — but is otherwise unselected, enabling generalisations to be made.

It is apparent that each of the four species of moths exploits an exceedingly wide range of families and species of plants. Not all could be described as “low plants”, as included in the list are such species as *Malus sylvestris* (apple), *Sambucus nigra* (elder) and *Betula pendula* (birch). What is especially apparent is that the larvae of these moths are in every sense generalist feeders, even though a further 43 families of plants are recorded from the garden and are not listed as food-plants. Each moth exhibits what appears to be an indiscriminate choice of food-plants, and yet only six of the 35 families scored are used by all four species, eight by three species, nine by two species, and the

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